

RESOLUTION NO. RS2019-_____

A resolution opposing Governor Bill Lee's proposed Tennessee Education Savings Account program currently pending before the Tennessee General Assembly.

WHEREAS, in his State of the State Address delivered March 4, 2019, Governor Bill Lee proposed an Education Savings Account (ESA) program in Tennessee, stating that the program "will strengthen public schools and provide choices for parents at the same time"; and

WHEREAS, under the proposed plan, families in Tennessee would receive \$7,300 public dollars -- in the form of a voucher -- to use for private schools and a variety of educational services and supplies including uniforms, transportation to private schools, online courses, tutoring, or homeschool curriculums; and

WHEREAS, the plan would allocate seventy-five million dollars (\$75,000,000) over the next three years to begin the program, and could eventually cost taxpayers as much as one hundred twenty-five million dollars (\$125,000,000) by 2024; and

WHEREAS, in addition, the proposed legislation instructs the Tennessee Department of Education to verify the student's legal status in Tennessee, prompting legal concerns regarding the constitutionality of this provision following a 1982 United States Supreme Court ruling which declared that students who enter the United States illegally cannot be denied a public education; and

WHEREAS, increasing public concern is emerging over whether low-income families in Tennessee would be left to compete for private school seats with families that have significantly more money, and that this ESA program will divert taxpayer money away from public schools; and

WHEREAS, research shows that in Arizona, 75 percent of all ESA funding is used by affluent families; and

WHEREAS, the proposed Tennessee ESA program establishes a high income level threshold -- approximately twice the federal earnings limit to qualify for reduced-price school lunches -- prompting further concerns that middle-class families, not low-income families, will be the primary beneficiaries of the program; and

WHEREAS, new research suggests that private school vouchers may in fact harm students who receive them and place voucher students at risk for falling behind their peers in traditional public schools; and

WHEREAS, studies of school voucher programs in Indiana, Louisiana, and Ohio found that students who used vouchers to attend private schools fared worse academically compared to their peers attending public schools -- particularly in reading and math; and

WHEREAS, ESA programs in other states have been plagued by abuse and fraud, leading to significant losses of taxpayer dollars; and

WHEREAS, this new program could have unexpected and negative impacts upon Tennessee's students and taxpayers. Before enacting the proposed Education Savings Account program in Tennessee, thorough research regarding the effectiveness and sufficiency of school voucher programs should be conducted.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE COUNCIL OF THE METROPOLITAN GOVERNMENT OF NASHVILLE AND DAVIDSON COUNTY:

Section 1. That the Metropolitan Council hereby goes on record as opposing Governor Bill Lee's proposed education savings account legislation currently pending before the Tennessee General Assembly.

Section 2. The Metropolitan Clerk is directed to send a copy of this Resolution to House Speaker Glen Casada, to each member of the Davidson County Delegation to the Tennessee General Assembly, and to Governor Bill Lee.

Section 3. That this Resolution shall take effect from and after its adoption, the welfare of The Metropolitan Government of Nashville and Davidson County requiring it.

INTRODUCED BY:

Member of Council